

ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

As if from another country

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Abstract

This article is written in response to an invitation, issued to members of the consortium that established ATOL ten years ago, to reflect on their professional and ATOL-related preoccupations over this period of time. The author describes the last phase of her working life which saw her take an unexpected turn into university management, followed by another seismic shift into retirement and a welcome re-turn to her art practice.

Key words: management, art practice, looking, thinking, experiencing, remembering, writing, ATOL.

I hesitate. I prevaricate. I wonder what on earth to say, not least because it feels like I've travelled a long way away from art therapy, and from ATOL, in the last ten years. However, the tenth anniversary of an art therapy journal, and a solely online journal at that, is well worth celebrating and I feel that I must respond to the invitation to think about the journal or the profession, or to reflect on politics and the passing of time.

That ATOL has survived, let alone receives the very healthy hit rates that it does, and has become an exemplar for the platform that hosts Goldsmiths, University of London's online journals is testimony enough to its success. Add the international authors and readers, articles that explore and embrace the diversity of art therapy theory and practice and challenge the boundaries and representations of our field, all of this constitutes a major contribution to the profession in my view, especially in these challenging times.

But what can I say about ATOL, its development and contribution? I was actively involved in its beginnings. Prior to its launch I had become Head of the Department (HoD) at Goldsmiths that included art therapy programmes in its offer and was in a position to drive its inception through the institutional maze. Thereafter my involvement was, if I'm honest, in name only.

And there you have the title of this article: I look (back) at ATOL and it is as if I'm looking at it, and indeed art therapy as a whole, from another country. So the invitation to contribute to ATOL's tenth anniversary issue is a little troubling: my contribution might not have much to do with art therapy.

However, if my overriding theme is to be about a move away from art therapy, how do I account for my involvement in the publication of three books and a couple of papers during this time (Gilroy, 2011; Gilroy, Tipple and Brown, 2012; Gilroy, 2014; Gilroy, Linnell, McKenna and Westwood, 2019; Gilroy, Linnell, McKenna and Westwood, 2020)? How does this constitute an increasing distance? That I conceive it thus will tell you that even though I sometimes travel back, nowadays my mind is usually elsewhere.

What follows is a personal, visual essay that summarises a period during which I became a senior manager at Goldsmiths, University of London; retired from full-time work; moved from town to country; and embarked on an 'encore' career. It is part of my autobiography as an artist.

Becoming a manager

Looking at my academic diary for 2009/10 I see that my entry into university management began in August 2009. (I look and there's a moment of confusion before I recall that UK academic diaries begin in August.) I was at an art therapy conference in Santiago, Chile in the summer and on return was plunged into meetings: with the Senior Management Team of the College and departmental staff, and with new colleagues in Human Resources, Finance and Planning. The stuff of nightmares? Indeed! Coupled with the horror of mixing with 'suits' akin to the men at the bottom right of Figure 1 (Tony Blair, Prime Minister of the UK 1997 – 2007 and Jeremy Paxman, a rather fierce journalist and broadcaster), seen in a collage made as I was about to become HoD. This is a simplistic cliché of anticipated gendered relations in the university's corridors of power that, when it came to it, I rarely encountered, although the 3am owls and bats were real enough.



Figure 1: *HoD demons*. Andy Gilroy (2009). Collage, ink and ink wash on paper.

I remember during these management years that it felt good to finally send a manuscript to a publisher (Gilroy, 2011), and that it was a relief to sometimes return to the familiar territory of teaching and research and to meet with Chris and Robin to work on our book (Gilroy, Tipple and Brown, 2012). I notice in my 2009/10 diary the occasional ATOL-related meeting but nothing thereafter. When I could find the time, usually on holiday, I would sometimes draw. I also see from my academic diaries 2009-2013 that I soon began a number of intensive drawing and printmaking courses which included learning to draw on an iPad (Figure 2). That I turned to my art practice rather than to clinical or research preoccupations for my Continuing Professional Development is telling, i.e. apart from the required management training.

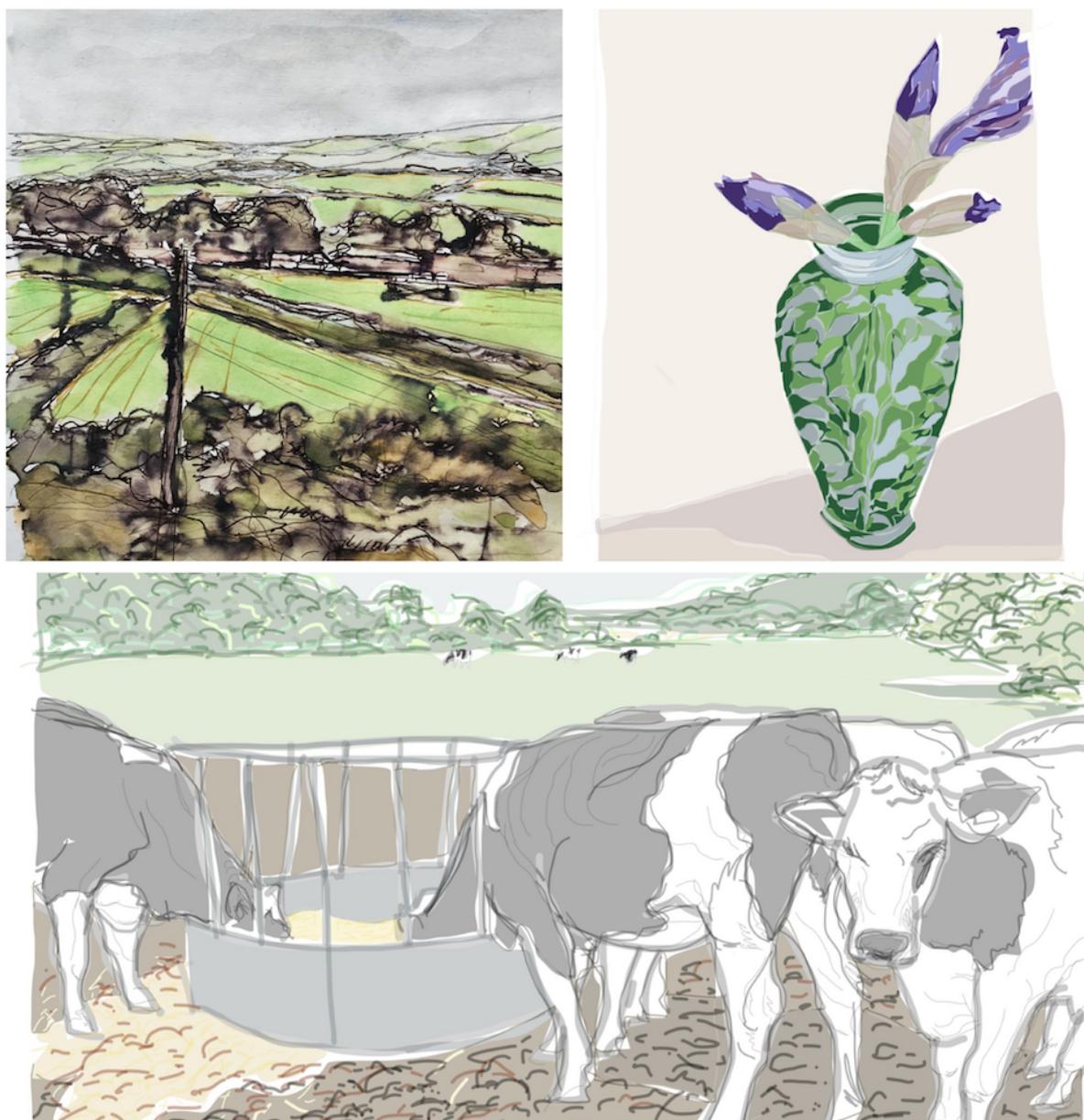


Figure 2: *Collage*. Andy Gilroy (2019). From top left, clockwise: *From Vicky's window*. Andy Gilroy (2012). Pencil, fineliner, ink and watercolour on paper; *Wonky iris*. Andy Gilroy (2011). iPad drawing. *Cows at lunch*. Andy Gilroy (2010) iPad drawing.

Being a HoD certainly took its toll. It was the most demanding, exhausting job that I ever had and so, perhaps inevitably, I soon relinquished almost all my involvement with art therapy education and research; similarly with ATOL. The workload was phenomenal – as a fellow HoD once remarked, “It’s like standing under an enormous waterfall that never stops”. It was often very challenging, hugely pressurised, sometimes mind-

numbingly tedious, and I drew extensively upon my therapy skills and knowledge. For example, as I moved into role it was useful to be able to identify transference issues and gendered power enactments as relationships with colleagues changed; similarly, given the departmental restructure with which I was tasked, it was hugely helpful to be able to face conflict and talk openly with people who were angry and distressed.

Being a HoD and later Interim Pro Warden for Students and Learning Development (and therefore, briefly, a member of Goldsmiths' Senior Management Team) was also fascinating. This was to do with gaining a bird's eye view of a university with all its constituent parts and seeing how the whole organisation operated. This was not only in terms of learning about academic departments other than my own but also in relation to working with systems and staff with whom, as an academic embedded in my discipline, I'd previously had little or no awareness or connection, let alone an appreciation. Seeing the landscape of Higher Education in the UK from these new positions also enabled me to comprehend, in a way that I hadn't quite before, the enormity of the challenge that art therapy – in particular, art therapy *research* – faces in making even the tiniest of impressions upon it, more and more so during these neo-liberal times.

'Retirement'

And then, in 2013, I retired from full-time employment. This was not as sudden as it sounds; it was a planned departure that I had been thinking about and working towards for some time. For a few years I 'phased' my exit from the College, seeing my remaining PhD students through to completion and being an External Trustee of Goldsmiths Students' Union. I was pleased to have this voluntary role for several years, not least because I felt that I was able to 'give back' to students some of the things I had learnt during the last, head-spinning phase of my career at Goldsmiths.

Figure 3 shows the space that I hoped would open up after the remorselessness of management, and of academic life too. I longed to leave behind those dry and dusty, though rather beautiful briefcases full of manuscripts; to think about what *I* wanted to think about rather than what the institution, colleagues, staff and students wanted me to think about; to have my identity slowly melt and morph into something new; to do my

garden; to learn the language of a new, different kind of life and walk through the tissue paper noren¹ into a calmer, more open landscape.



Figure 3: *Retirement*. Andy Gilroy (2012). Collage, fineliners, ink and ink wash on paper.

After such an intense and pressurised working life the relief on entering that open landscape was enormous and the freedom intoxicating. It reminded me of the time immediately after leaving art school: being freed from the constraints of an institution to do whatever I wanted, though this time without having to think about earning a living, thanks to the privilege of a good pension. So I relaxed, I *slept*. I had no difficulty *at all* with easing into a non-working life. There were 'drifting days' when I did virtually nothing; when asked about who I was and what I did I would reply that I was 'a

¹ Noren are Japanese fabric room dividers or curtains, often found over windows but mainly in doorways. Rectangular in shape, they have vertical slits from the bottom almost to the top that allow you to walk through an entrance.

recovering academic'. But gradually I did more of the non-work things that I'd always done: I did my garden (Figure 4), drew the flowers that I grew (Figure 5), arranged and photographed them (Figure 6), created mini installations, and documented the exhibitions I saw and wrote in the A3 Seawhite books that I've kept for years (Figure 7). As time went on increased opportunities for travel led to more iPad drawings (Figure 8), and I prepared to move house.

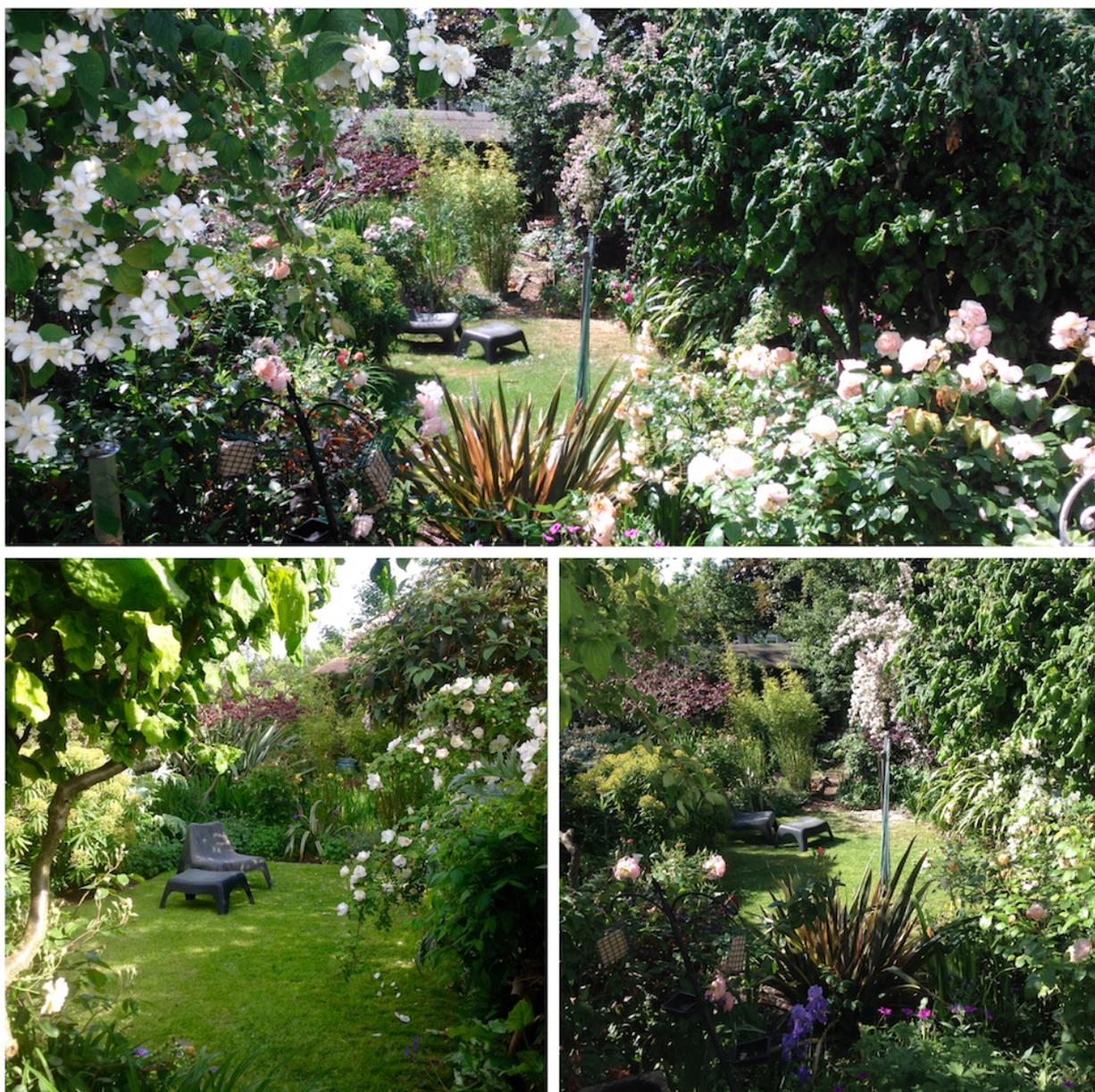


Figure 4. *London garden collage*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Clockwise from top: *View through I*. Andy Gilroy (2013). Photograph. *View through II*. Andy Gilroy (2013). Photograph. *View through III*. Andy Gilroy (2013). Photograph.



Figure 5. *Plant drawings collage*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Clockwise from top: *Amaryllis*. Andy Gilroy (2016). Ink and ink wash on paper. *Primroses*. Andy Gilroy (2016). Oil pastels and pencil on paper. *Tulip*. Andy Gilroy (2015). Ink and ink wash on paper.



Figure 6. *Flowers collage*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Clockwise from top left: hellebores; roses; roses and viburnum; arum and winter jasmine; cotinus, cornflower and lilac; cotinus, roses and arum.

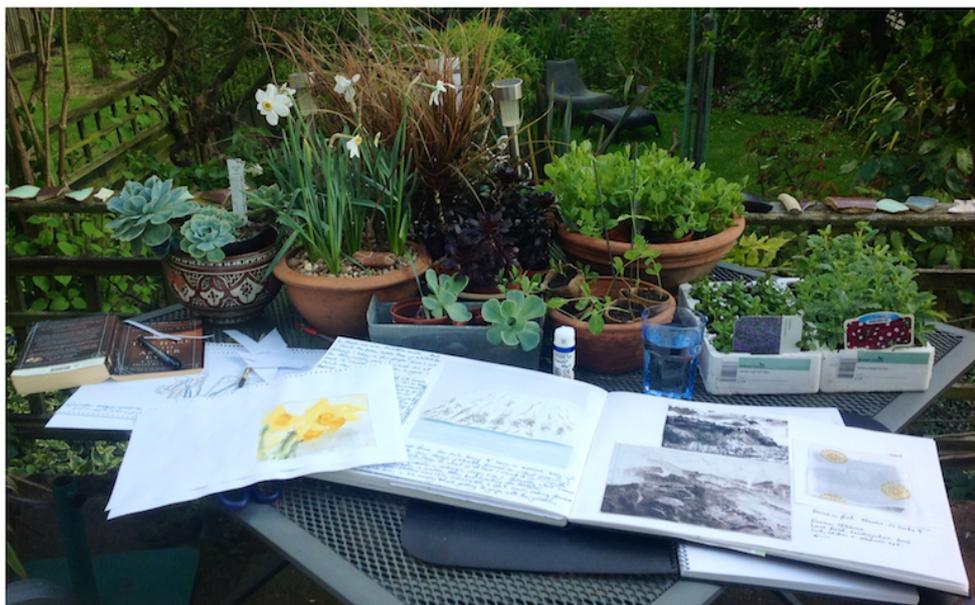
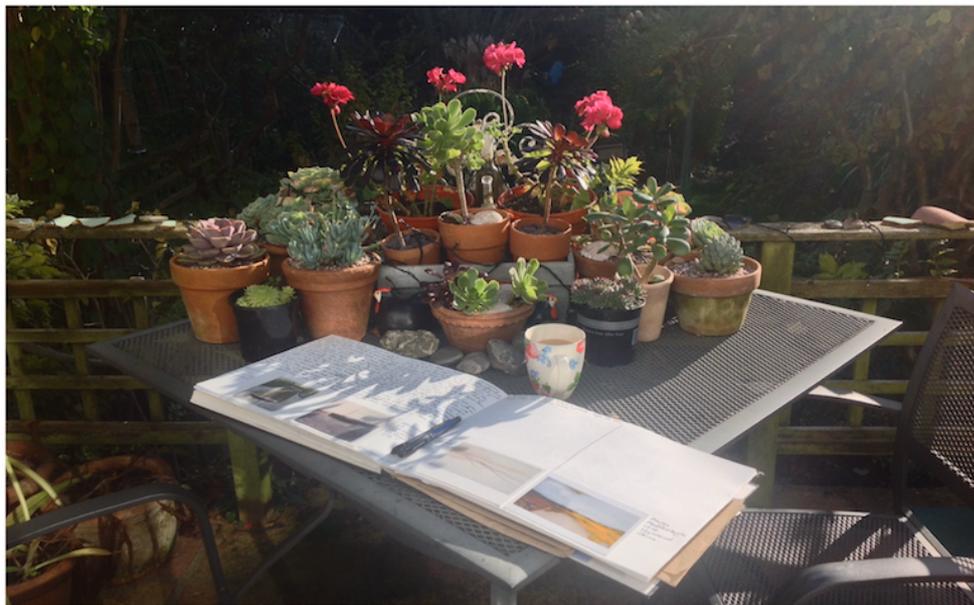


Figure 7: *Books and flowers collage*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Top: *Deck I*. Andy Gilroy, (2011). Photograph. Bottom: *Deck II*. Andy Gilroy, (2012). Photograph.

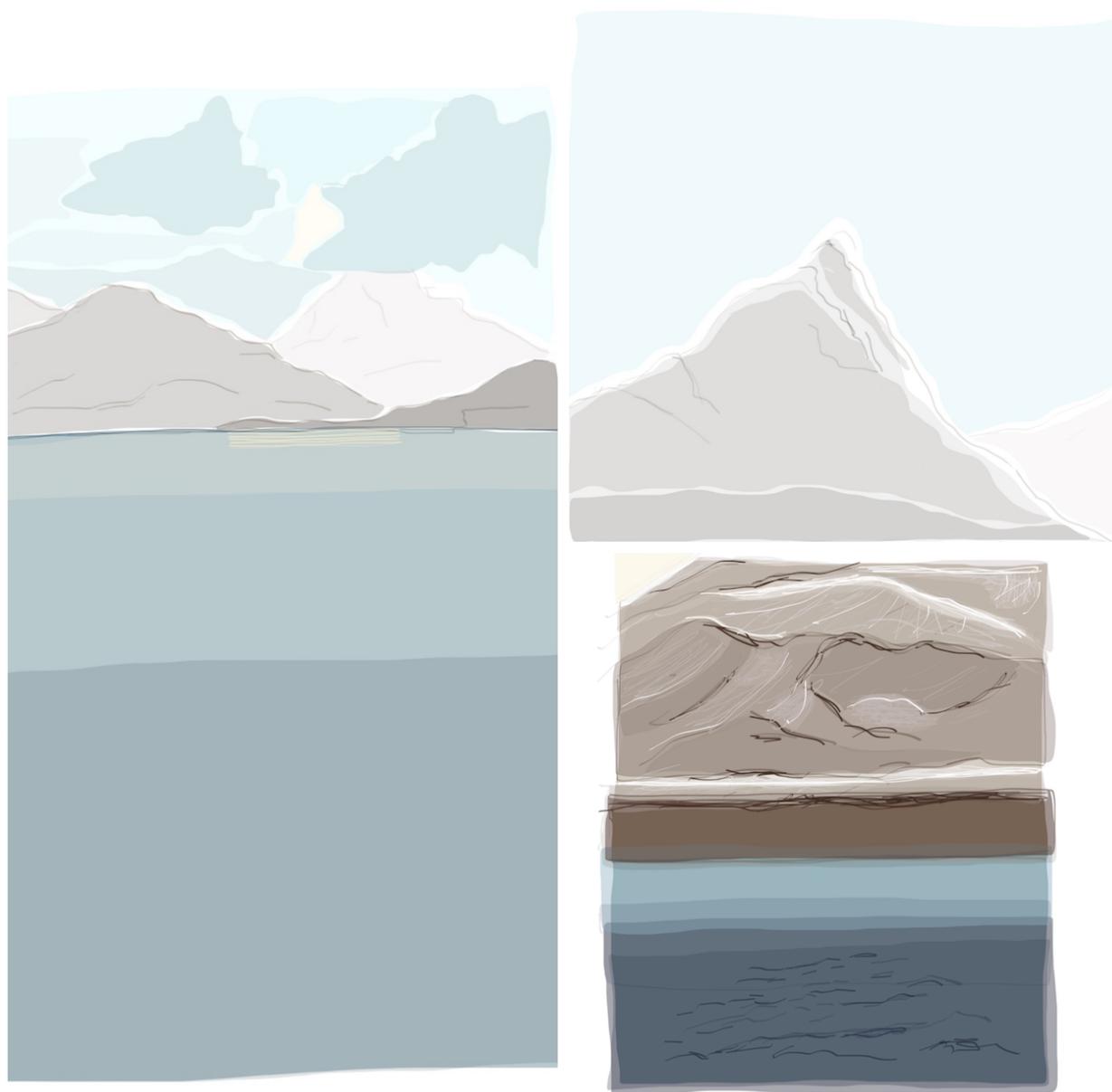


Figure 8: *Norway iPad drawings collage*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Clockwise from left: *A bit of sun*. Andy Gilroy (2014). iPad drawing. *Pale mountain*. Andy Gilroy (2014). iPad drawing. *Up close*. Andy Gilroy (2014). iPad drawing.

Moving out of London saw me embark on a major renovation project, almost a self-build, but both during and subsequently I struggled to maintain and develop my art practice. I have always been interested in art therapists' autobiographies as artists, and in my own (Gilroy, 1989/2004; 1992). I had thought, hoped, that as far as I was concerned the occasional nature of my art practice was primarily a function of the availability of time and mind. That I now had both the time and the mind and my art

practice was still occasional was both troubling and ironic, given that I had spent enormous amounts of time, energy and money to get myself to a place where I would have a studio and be within walking distance of draw-able landscape, this being an aspect of my art practice that has always engaged me. However, I continued to draw while on holiday (Figures 9 and 10), designed and built a new garden (Figure 11) – I am a gardener – and completed the long-standing book project that was ‘Art Therapy in Australia. Taking a Postcolonial, Aesthetic Turn’ (Gilroy et al, 2019). Maybe there had not been quite so much time and mind available as I thought.



Figure 9: *Isle of Harris and Lewis collage I*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Top to bottom: *Harris iPhone I*. Andy Gilroy (2017). iPhone drawing. *Harris iPhone II*. Andy Gilroy (2017). iPhone drawing. *Harris iPhone III*. Andy Gilroy (2017). iPhone drawing.

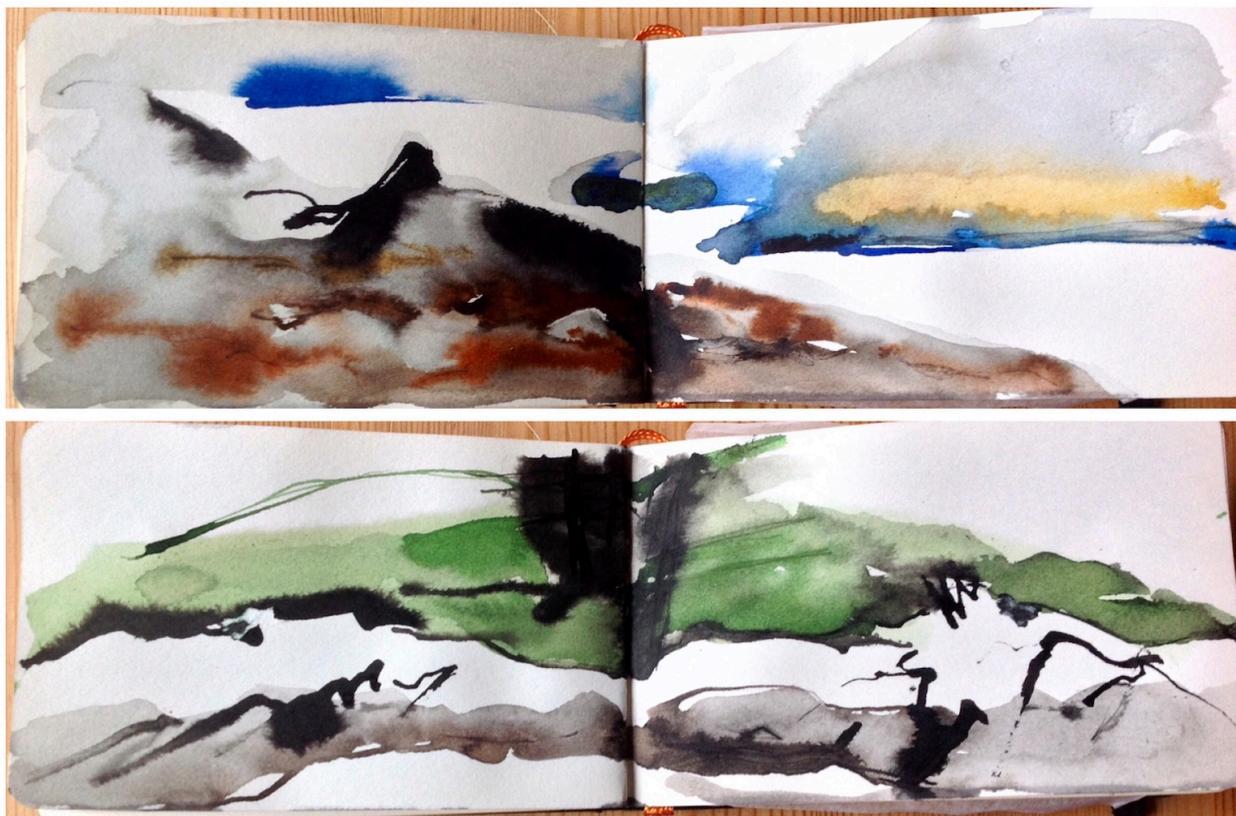


Figure 10: *Isle of Harris and Lewis collage II*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Top to bottom: *Harris drawing I*. Andy Gilroy (2017). Ink on paper. *Harris drawing II*. Andy Gilroy (2017). Ink on paper.



Figure 11: *Kent garden collage*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Clockwise from the top: *Dahlia panorama*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Photograph. *Looking through to the pond*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Photograph. *Dahlias and sweet peas*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Photograph.

Working on this book was interesting. I found myself very reluctant to read the relevant literature, analyse data etc., i.e. to return to art therapy and my previous, academic, modus operandi. I was happy to edit but was much more interested in creative writing and the visual and aesthetic aspects of the book. (The lack of visuality in the great majority of art therapy publications has, commercial constraints of the publishing

industry aside, always bothered me.) My preference was to draw its threads together through a large collage that described something of the book's history, themes and visualities (Figure 12). This large collage traces (one of) the book's beginnings in the Blue Mountains outside Sydney, through different events and iconic Australian images to screenshots of the editors' final Skype discussions (see the Introduction to Gilroy et al, 2019).



Figure 12: *Australian book collage*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Clockwise from the bottom: *It's been a long time*. Andy Gilroy (2016/17). Collage, pencil, pastels and tissue paper on paper. *It's been a long time* (detail). *At the edge of the water*. Andy Gilroy (2016/17).

Collage, pencil, pastels and tissue paper on paper. *It's been a long time* (detail). *A kiss for the art therapist*. Andy Gilroy (2016/17). Collage, pencil, pastels and tissue paper on paper.

By early 2019 the book was published, the major works on my new home and garden were completed and several voluntary commitments came to an end. At last my art practice began to go somewhere. This is undoubtedly a function of time but I think it was, is, also due to a change in my mind: there's a focus and a certain urgency developing that I think is a consequence of ageing. There's a great deal that I want to see and draw, and time is getting on.

Recent work: looking, sensing, experiencing and writing

Recent work has seen me continuing to draw the different places that I inhabit (Figures 13 and 14) and visit (Figures 15, 16, 18 and 19). These eschew conventional pictorial narrative, trying instead to capture something of the whole of my looking and being in that place during those moments of making. I'm not trying to accurately transcribe what I see, though sometimes a series begins in this way with carefully observed pencil drawings. I look and see selectively, (as we all do, see Gilroy, 2008/14), examining the darks, the lights, the lines and the colours that interest me and which, collectively, make the forms (Figure 13).

In these drawings the process of making is not hidden, indeed to some extent it is their subject. I find that I often move from intense and repeated observation through to a more spontaneous, semi-abstract essence of what I'm looking at. Figure 10, for example, shows two, small ink drawings that were the last of a series of drawings made over the course of one day. These began with detailed pencil drawings of two particular, side-by-side places and concluded with images that reduced them to an inky core. Similarly the iPhone drawings invariably begin with a rather detailed look, often in pencil or its iPad app equivalent, and progress over the course of several days through to a visual essence, seen in different weather conditions and at the same, or at different, times of day (Figures 9 and 19).



Figure 13: *Field drawings collage I*. Andy Gilroy (2020). Top to bottom: *Field and tree I*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Pencil on paper. *Field and tree II*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Pencil, carbon conte pencil and coloured pencils on paper. *Field and tree III*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Pencil, carbon conte pencil, coloured pencils and wash on paper.

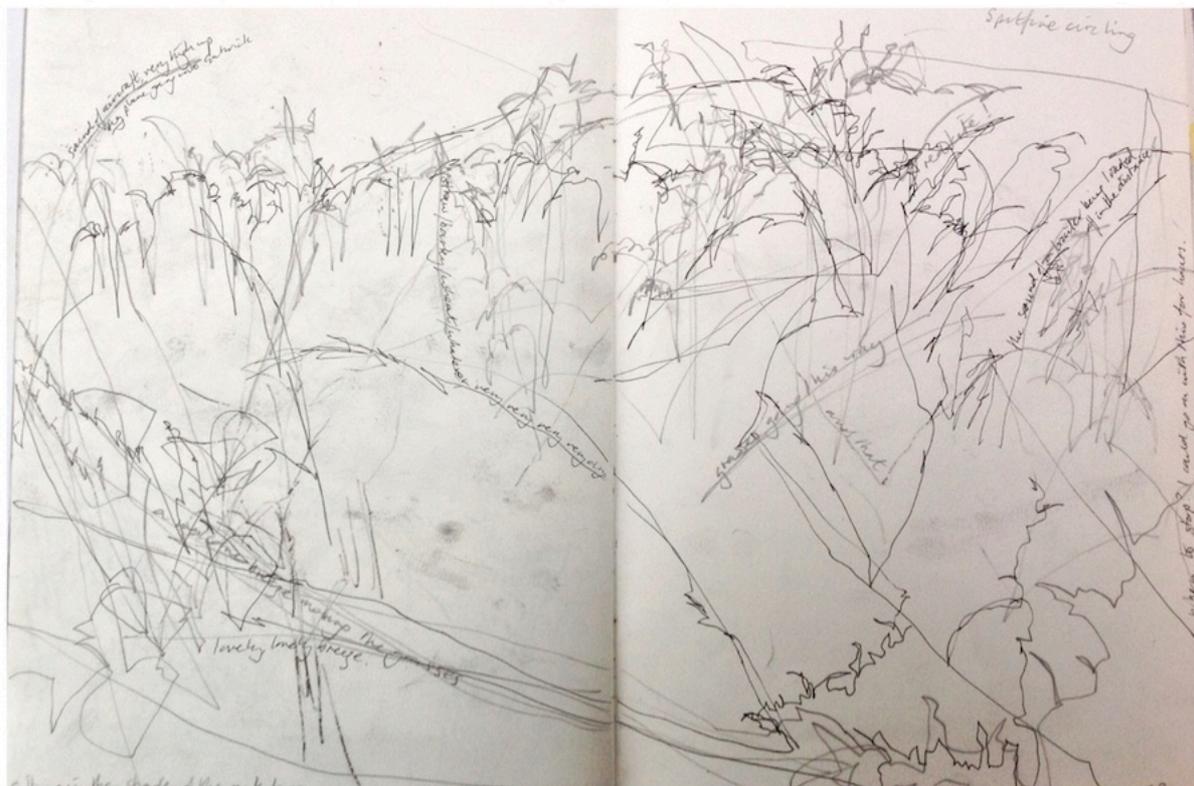


Figure 14: *Field drawings collage II*. Andy Gilroy (2020). Top to bottom: *Dry hedgerow*. Andy Gilroy (2018). Pencil and fineliner on paper. *Dry field*. Andy Gilroy (2018). Pencil, fineliner, coloured pencils and watercolour on paper.

However, given that much of my work has landscape as its starting point and that I'm therefore *en plein air*, I'm not only looking, I'm also *sensing and experiencing* – the weather, the sounds and the smells as well as the events that happen in that place at that time: being startled by the sudden explosion of pigeons from a hedge behind me, noticing a red kite soaring above, listening to the creaking and susurrations of the trees, feeling the wind on my face and the warmth of the sun on my back, and being irritated by passers-by who want to see what I'm doing. I draw and I write about it all (Figure 14). I describe what happens and jot down what people say around and sometimes to me; these become haiku-like stories (Figures 15 and 16). I also note the random, unconnected thoughts that flash through my mind while I'm drawing. These marginalia that ordinarily are adjacent to vision and art-making have, for me, an important and distinctive place in the whole process of making a drawing and so they are written in, the marks becoming part of the composition so that the drawn and written lines develop a visual correspondence.

This combination of drawing and writing has been prompted by several things: a long-held wish to bring text and image, and making, looking and thinking together; a liking of the notes-to-self about colour and form etc. often found in 'sketchbooks' (friends know how I *hate* that term – I emphatically do *not* go out *sketching!*); and, again, an abiding curiosity about my, and others, autobiographies as artists.



Figure 15: *Cyprus drawings collage I*. Andy Gilroy (2020). Top to bottom: *On the road to Nicosia I*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Pencil and watercolour on paper. *Paphos Archaeological Park*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Pencil, fineliner and watercolour on paper. *Church, Fabrika Hill, Paphos*. Andy Gilroy (2019). Pencil, fineliner, wash and watercolour on paper.

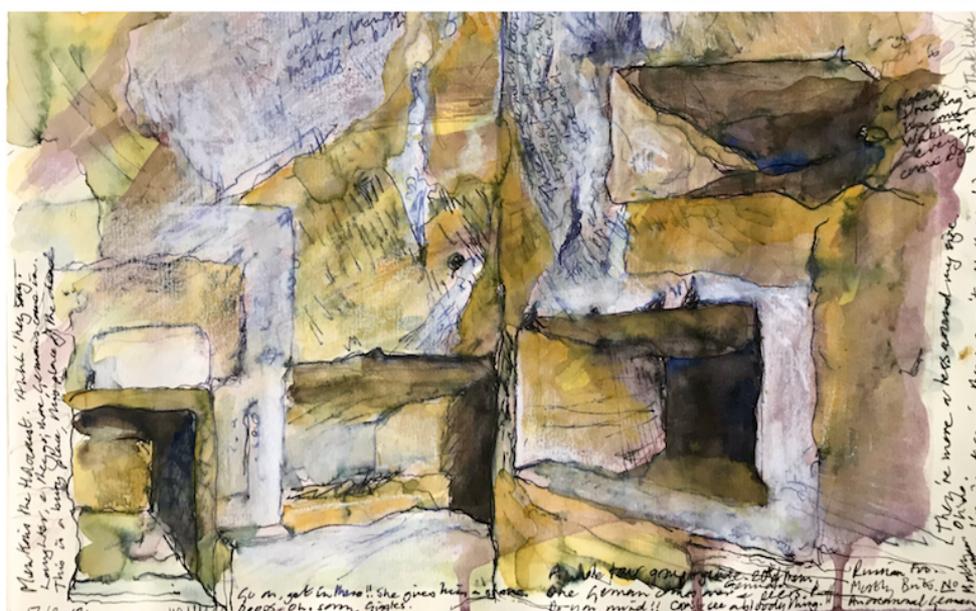


Figure 16: Cyprus drawings collage II. Andy Gilroy (2020). Ayios Neophytos Monastery. Andy Gilroy (2019). Pencil, fineliner and watercolour on paper. Small tombs, Tombs of the Kings, Paphos. Andy Gilroy (2019). Pencil, fineliner and watercolour on paper.

I am always struck by the memories that come flooding back when I look at the drawings, paintings and prints that I have made over the years. I find that I am catapulted back and can recall my looking and being, where I made the work and what I was thinking and feeling at the time. Of course this is standard fare within the art therapy process but I am struck by how my memories often include sensory experiences: the 'eyeballing' intensity of the looking, the feel of the pencil or brush in my hand and the ambiance of my surroundings: the weather, the sounds and sometimes even the smells – for example, remembering the heady mix of oil, turps and ink that characterises a particular print room or the eye-watering smell of a cow-filled farm. Not all of this is available to the viewer, nor is it always fully available to me. My wish is not to make the whole of my art-making experience visible either to myself or to an audience; rather I think I'm trying to portray, and perhaps memorialise, a whole passage of time – whether five or twenty minutes, an hour or an afternoon, a whole day or a series of days (Figures 9, 10, 13, 14 and 19) – and capture the events and proprioceptive experiences that are not ordinarily recorded in a drawing.

This making, looking, thinking and remembering is something that I have wondered about before in relation to the influence of location on the making and audiencing processes in clinical and other practices (Gilroy, 2008/2014). My interest in these same issues continues, though now in relation to my own experience of looking and making in place. This links to the strong visual awareness of the world that I have always had; I have always *liked looking*. Not so long ago I found a drawing made for an art school project when I was twenty, drawn from a photograph of myself as a toddler (Figure 17). At the time I did not like the drawing because I thought I looked angry. Looking at the drawing and the photograph now, I do not think I was angry; rather I think I was looking intently at the camera, or at whoever was taking the photograph.

That I was looking with such interest when so young does not surprise me when I consider that my first memory of pretty much anything is highly visual and to do with making a picture, this when I was about four or five years old. (Reader: take a moment here to recall your first memory of art, of making something. It's worth thinking about.) My memory is of an intense visual excitement about 'magic' painting books. I remember so clearly my amazement and delight at the emergence of different colours on a white page – the brilliant pinks, turquoises, blues and greens that appeared as I painted

water on separate parts of the picture (and my frustration at not having sufficient motor control to stop the colours merging). This is where it all began. That 'wow!' has stayed with me. I have always looked intently and been fascinated by the visual: by the juxtaposition of colour and form, by the way the world *looks*.²



Figure 17: *Toddler me*. Andy Gilroy (1969/70). Pencil on paper.

² Theory related to a sense of awe and the artist's 'love affair with the world' can be found in Greenacre (1959, 1960). Other formative experiences associated with becoming an artist, and later an art therapist, include the influence on a child and/or young person of significant others who themselves have an interest in art (Rosenberg and Fleigel, 1965), and experiencing not only 'creative living' through art but also its self-expressive qualities (Winnicott, 1980). See Gilroy, 1992 and 1995 for elaboration.

Now it feels like I'm learning about art all over again: how to *really look* at the world and get it onto a 2D surface in a way that captures my whole experience of looking, making and being-whenever-I-am. However, I have realised in a way that I had not quite before that the kind of engagement I want with my art practice is *hugely* time-consuming. It's a real commitment. Obviously. It is a truism to say that any form of making (or writing or composing) is 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration: you *have* to turn up, you have to *practice*. Looking back, my working life simply did not allow more than a sporadic attendance in the studio and that always troubled me (Gilroy, 1989): art-making may have been crucial but it remained occasional (Gilroy, 2004: 71). Of course I could have carved out the time to develop my art practice but for all kinds of reasons I did not. I was not one of those art therapists who had a steady and regular commitment to an art practice and exhibited regularly; nor was I 'on the fringes' and only just keeping in touch with it all. I was somewhere in between, more akin to those whose art practice was primarily linked to work, be it in staff art practice days or in the exploration of personal and countertransference material (see Gilroy, 1989, 1992). For longer than I care to think about my primary attention was elsewhere, my *priorities* were elsewhere, and my creativity was channelled into teaching, research and writing: after all, the institutional demands on art therapy academics were, are, for books and journal articles, not drawings and paintings. I do not say this with regret; it is simply the way it was and the consequence of choices I made. Now, it's different.

Here I must acknowledge others who have also developed art practices as full-time work recedes and time and space open up (in ATOL alone see Brown, 2019; Edwards and Damarell, 2019). Understanding the huge significance of time and how one can return to an abiding passion or what preceded becoming an art therapist – all the unfinished business that one accumulates along the way – has helped me feel less bothered by the occasional nature of my art practice throughout my working life. What strikes me now though is how, when I moved away from art therapy education and research and into university management, I almost immediately (re)turned to what I have always thought of, and indeed described, as my primary discipline: art. Perhaps being an art therapy academic had enabled a 'good enough' connection to art after all, albeit an intermittent one. Once I was away from art therapy, I had to engage directly with my art practice.

Nowadays I'm striving to develop a rhythm, a structure, a discipline of looking and making. I make no particular claims for my work; it is simply what I do. I love working outside in a landscape, and drawing on my iPad (Figure 18) and iPhone intrigues me, whether *en plein air* or in my studio. I enjoy moving between screen and paper, importing drawings and photographs, altering them, and drawing and writing into them further, either on the screen or on the print (see Figures 6, 8 and 9 in Gilroy, Linnell, McKenna and Westwood, this volume).



Figure 18: *iPad drawings collage*. Andy Gilroy (2020). Clockwise from top left: *Ring of Brodgar, Orkney*. Andy Gilroy (2019). iPad drawing. *Looking towards Hoy*. Andy Gilroy (2019). iPad drawing. *Orphir, Orkney*. Andy Gilroy (2019). iPad drawing. *Out the window at Cae Haidd*. Andy Gilroy (2019). iPad drawing.

Now that a body of work is building I've been thinking about means of display. I have had some of the iPad and iPhone drawings printed (to their respective screen-size scale) by a fine art printmaker and I am contemplating making the iPhone drawings (Figures 9 and 19) into tiny, phone size, artist books.

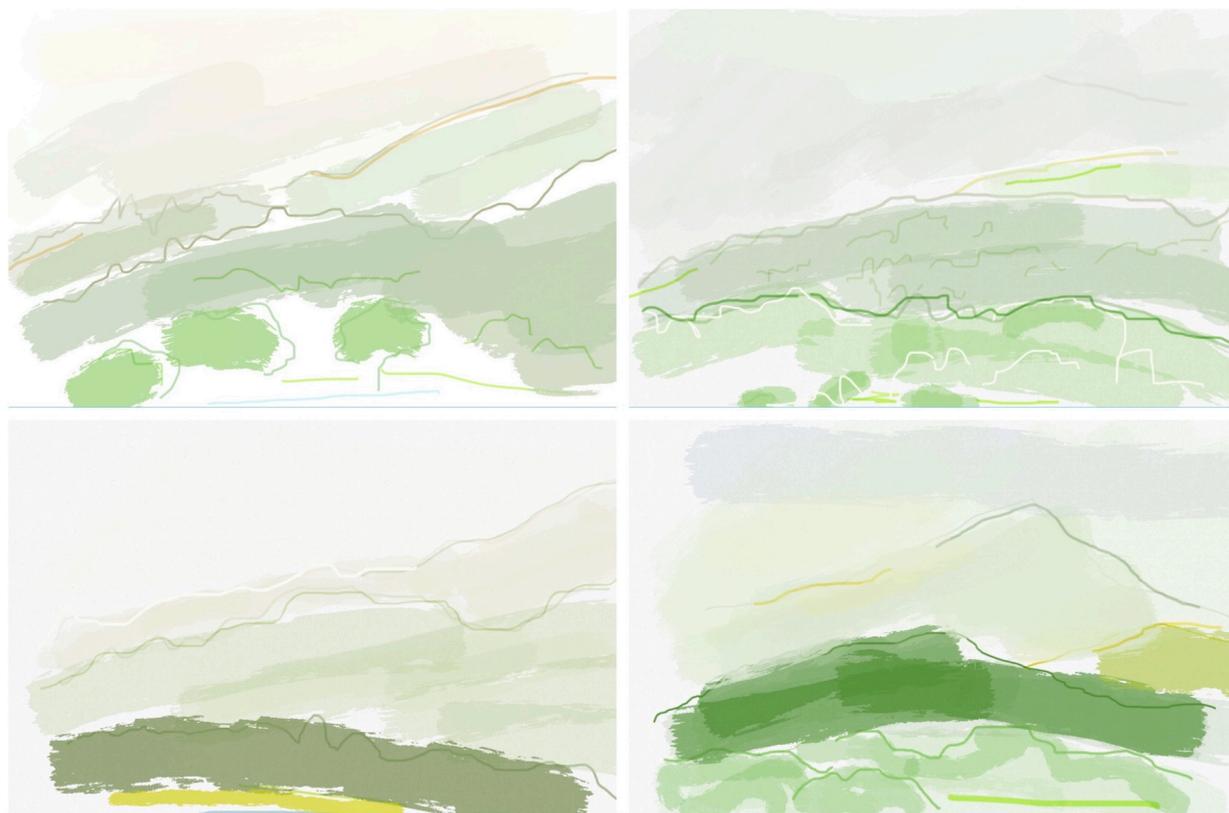


Figure 19: *Schiehallion collage*. Andy Gilroy (2020). Clockwise from top left: *Schiehallion I*. Andy Gilroy (2019). iPhone drawing. *Schiehallion II*. Andy Gilroy (2019). iPhone drawing. *Schiehallion III*. Andy Gilroy (2019). iPhone drawing. *Schiehallion IV*. Andy Gilroy (2019). iPhone drawing.

I was telling a friend of a friend about these iPhone drawings recently and wondering idly with her what I might do with them; shortly afterwards she introduced me to someone else as an artist, one who made artist books. Oh! Really?! Whether or not it's an accurate descriptor who knows, but it's more and more what, or rather who, I feel like these days. It's like a new job, an 'encore' career as an artist.

Backwards and forward

So I look back from this new place and remember when ATOL started. Its initial remit was to be an international journal of art, therapy, politics and culture, *and* art therapy. There's a developing international authorship, writing in different languages with accompanying translation into English, but the inferred interdisciplinarity in the original brief seems to me to be undeveloped. I say this knowing how time-consuming translation is and how hard it is to generate submissions, but I do wonder if more contributions from practitioners not only beyond the English-speaking world but from colleagues outside art therapy per se, might enrich the journal and expand its profile. For example, could there be regular guest editors from other countries, and perhaps from allied disciplines too? Becoming a little less local could expand the journal's profile and raise awareness of art therapy and its rigour as a clinical and academic discipline. It would also enhance its attractiveness and value for colleagues in Higher Education who need to publish in journals that have impact in research assessment frameworks.

More significantly for me now as I browse through ATOL's archive is the number and richness of the images. Here ATOL has a distinct advantage over printed journals but I do wonder if more attention could be paid to the visual. The layout and design of the 'page' seems restrictive and uninspiring. I say this with an acute awareness not only of what online publishing can now achieve (vis Gilroy et al, 2019) but also that ATOL will be constrained by what the platform will allow. Nonetheless, has the technology been updated? This would require financial investment from the host and time, skills development and perhaps funding applications on the part of the editors, all of which (in my view) would be very worthwhile. I cannot help but think that current technology could enable ATOL to be a much more visually dynamic presence in the art therapy literature than it is at the moment.

But rather guiltily I say all of the above from elsewhere, from a place where my commitments are to my art practice, and to my garden.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to friends who read drafts of this paper at various stages of its development. You know who you are.

Biography

Andrea (Andy) Gilroy is Emeritus at Goldsmiths, University of London where she spent 35 years as an art therapy educator and researcher and, latterly, a senior manager at the College. She has published widely, including *Art Therapy Research and Evidence-Based Practice* (2006) and, most recently, *Art Therapy in Australia. Taking a Postcolonial, Aesthetic Turn* (2019). Andy's 'encore' career has seen her return to her practice as an artist.

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